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ABSTRACT

Part of the School Improvement Research Series, this report describes two peer tutoring programs, one at the secondary and one at the primary level. The schools where the programs are conducted are both in the Lake Washington School District, across Lake Washington from Seattle. The report first cites Lake Washington High School (Kirkland), where major program features are as follows: elective credit; staffing by subject matter teachers; student selection based on interest and willingness; focus on target classes; tutor-tutee pairs; training for students; mini-lessons; a testing program; "master note takers"; recordkeeping; and planning/coordination activities. The report describes the program based on observation of three peer tutoring classes (the program involves 125 to 150 students) and includes student responses to questions on peer tutoring. At Benjamin Rush Elementary School (Redmond) the second school presented in the report, major features of the cross-age program include a reading room; tutor selection; tutee selection; partners in reading, a motivational reading program on a two-day cycle; use of the tutor's lunch/recess period; training for tutors; recordkeeping; and monthly meetings. A reading specialist's recommendations, a brief description of a tutoring session, and students' comments conclude the report. (SR)

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School Improvement Research Series 11

Effective Practices in Place: Snapshot #5

Peer Tutoring: Lake Washington High School Benjamin Rush Elementary School

Kathleen Cotton

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Research Findings

A review of effective schooling practices reveals that many support the use of peer tutoring. As indicated in *Effective Schooling Practices: A Research Synthesis* (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 1984) supportive research findings include:

At the **classroom** level:

1.2 *There are high expectations for student learning.*

- No students are expected to fall below the level of learning needed to be successful at the next level of education.

1.3 *Students are carefully oriented to lessons.*

- The relationship of a current lesson to previous study is described. Students are reminded of key concepts or skills previously covered.

1.4 *Instruction is clear and focused.*

1.5 *Learning progress is monitored closely.*

- Teachers frequently monitor student learning, both formally and informally.
- Teachers require that students be accountable for their academic work.

1.6 *When students don't understand, they are retaught.*

1.7 *Class time is used for learning.*

- Students are encouraged to pace themselves. If they don't finish during class, they work on lessons before or after school, during lunch or at other times so they keep up with what's going on in class.

1.11 *Personal interactions between teachers and students are positive.*

At the **school** level:

2.5 *School time is used for learning.*

- Extra learning time is provided for students who need or want it; students can get extra help outside of regular school hours.

2.6 *Learning progress is monitored closely.*

- Summaries of student performances are shared with all staff who then assist in developing action alternatives. Periodic reports are also made to the community.

This list of proven instructional and administrative practices suggests some of the actions teachers and schools can take to enhance student learning and other out-

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comes. Peer tutoring, with its focus on monitoring, support, and corrective feedback, represents specific means of implementing these practices. This report details a secondary peer tutoring program and a peer tutoring program operating at the primary level.

SITUATION

Lake Washington High School (Kirkland) and Benjamin Rush Elementary School (Redmond) are in the Lake Washington School District, located across Lake Washington from Seattle. Over 20,000 students attend Lake Washington's 31 schools. The area is predominantly suburban and relatively affluent ($27,500 median annual family income in 1984), although 15 percent of the population lives in households with less than $15,000 annual income. Over 90 percent of Lake Washington's students are Caucasian. The largest minority group is the 5.4 percent of the district's students who are of Asian extraction.

Lake Washington High School has 1,582 students in grades 10-12. Benjamin Rush is a K-6 school with 586 students.

In 1982, the Lake Washington School District made available $2 million for remediation programs, and schools within the district were invited to plan and develop their own remediation approaches. At Lake Washington High School and at Benjamin Rush Elementary School, an educational consultant to the district worked with school staffs to set up peer tutoring programs to help those students who were performing below grade level.

Context: Lake Washington High School

Observations of a peer tutoring program in operation in the Beaverton (Oregon) School District led Lake Washington High School staff to decide to develop and implement a similar program. However, whereas the Beaverton program included the use of instructional aides, the Lake Washington program was set up to be entirely reliant on students to conduct the tutoring.

Now in its sixth year of operation, the peer tutoring program is a well-established part of the life of the school. Depending upon the semester, the class meets for either five or six 55-minute periods per day, with 125 to 150 students participating. A part-time program manager and three part-time teachers staff the peer tutoring program. Major program features are as follows:

- **Elective credit.** Peer tutoring is an elective class for which both tutors and tutees receive credit towards graduation.

- **Staffing by subject matter teachers.** Based on the failure of some peer tutoring programs operated by special education teachers in special education resource rooms, Lake Washington program developers were careful not to put students off by using such a structure. Instead, the program has its own room and is staffed by social studies and English teachers, as well as special education teachers.

- **Student selection based on interest and willingness.** Potential tutors may be recommended by teachers or counselors; and potential tutees may be encouraged by counselors, teachers, or parents. Ultimately, however, self-selection is the major avenue by which students become involved. Program teachers have found that dedication and perserverance are the most important qualities in both tutors and tutees, and that these attitudes are not likely to be present if a student is in the class against his or her will.

- **Focus on target classes.** When signing up for peer tutoring, each tutee identifies a "target class" — one course in which he/she anticipates needing help — and this becomes the focus for the tutoring during the semester. Tutors identify target classes, too, and may receive help from the teacher and/or other students. The "target class" choice of the tutors serves primarily as a model for their tutees. They share with tutees their notebook organization, time management calendars, notes, assignment records, etc.

- **Tutor-tutee pairs.** Tutors and tutees are arranged in pairs or trios based on target class needs and ability to work together.

These partnerships are maintained throughout the semester.

- **Training.** At the beginnning of each semester tutors and tutees receive training in study skills, learning strategies, organizational skills, mnemonic devices, time management and other methods for learning how to learn effectively. Students also learn communication skills and ways to give each other encouragement and positive feedback. A cooperative learning approach is used for the training, with "veteran" and new members of the peer tutoring class working together.

- **Mini-lessons.** The first five to ten minutes of each peer tutoring class are devoted to reviewing learning strategies, tutoring methods, and other processes introduced in the initial training.

- **Testing program.** Students are periodically tested on learning strategies, study skills, and other content presented in the initial training and ongoing mini-lessons.

- **Master note takers.** Each regular class teacher designates a capable student to be "master note taker" for that subject on that day. The notes this student takes are made available in the peer tutoring room as a resource for students. A copy is also given to the "target class" teacher, who may use them for absentees, developing tests, and/or to check due dates.

- **Recordkeeping.** Records of student progress are kept through the use of forms such as Daily Learning Goals (which inludes a Learning Log), a Peer Tutoring Checklist, a Peer Tutoring Progress Report and bimonthly discussion sessions among tutors and teachers regarding the progress of tutees.

- **Planning/coordination activities.** Meetings of peer tutoring staff members are held weekly. Communications with classroom teachers are frequent and include class notes, progress reports, and informal verbal communication.

In discussing the evolution and present structure of the program, the program manager pointed out several additional features. She noted that intelligence *per se* is not sufficient to be a successful tutor. In addition to the willingness and dedication mentioned above, successful tutoring also requires patience, enough assertiveness to keep students on task and social skills to engage and motivate tutees. Some of the best tutors are students who have been tutored in the program themselves; these students can relate to the difficulties their tutees encounter, and they know from experience that the tutoring process can help them to succeed. In contrast, high achievers are sometimes impatient and unsupportive in their dealings with tutees.

Washington requires that students fulfill a requirement to earn **occupational credits** — credits for job/career-related activities. The program manager reported that an effort is currently under way to get occupational credit status for the peer tutoring program based on the content and processes students learn — content and processes which relate directly to careers in teaching, counseling, and many other social services. Citing the emphasis on teaching, testing, and skill building, the program manager emphasized that peer tutoring is not merely a "glorified study hall."

Evaluations of the program indicate that the **academic achievement** of participating students has improved as a result of their involvement. Teachers and students are also enthused about the **affective benefits** of the program — improvements in student attitudes and self-esteem, as well as breaking down social barriers and forming new friendships.

The manager noted two additional **unanticipated outcomes** of the program: One is that some participants have acquired paid, out-of-school tutoring jobs; families wanting to hire tutors frequently call the program manager for recommendations. Another is that the program has become a force in drug/alcohol interventions and suicide prevention. The close ties which often develop between tutors and tutees have resulted in students confiding in one another about these personal problems and being guided to sources of help.

Adult volunteers sometimes work with program students, too. However, since there is a strong emphasis on keeping the program a *peer* tutoring effort, these adults generally have roles other than providing tutoring.

They may check students' notebooks, review their progress, and make suggestions to improve the effectiveness of the tutoring.

Some students are both tutors and tutees, providing help in one subject area and receiving help in their own target subjects. Students have coined the term **teeters** to describe this double participation. Teeters claim that what they learn as tutors is helpful to them in their roles as tutees, and vice versa.

Handicapped students who appear likely to benefit from peer tutoring have begun participating in the program this year. When a boy with Down's Syndrome joined one of the peer tutoring classes, a special education teacher prepared the class by giving a presentation about Down's Syndrome, followed by a class discussion of the condition.

Benefits to the teachers in the peer tutoring classes are numerous. Familiarity with the coursework and assignments in a wide array of classes keeps them aware of what is occurring schoolwide. Moreover, the need to be able to provide at least basic assistance with this wide range of courses leads the peer tutoring teacher to become something of a "Renaissance person." Teachers also perform various counseling functions, thus increasing their skills and receiving personal gratification from helping students with their school-related and personal issues. Perhaps most rewarding of all, according to the program manager, are the responses students give when asked to identify, at the end of each semester, "something I learned from taking this class." Quite often, students have success stories to tell regarding improvements in a particular class, and sometimes students indicate that participation in peer tutoring brought them their first real experience of academic or social success.

Asked about any problems encountered in operating a peer tutoring class, the manager identified two issues. One of these is the push for increased graduation requirements. As graduation requirements increase, time is reduced for participation in peer tutoring, and, in the manager's view, the increased requirements result in needful students simply being given more classes to fail. The other issue is the toll taken on teachers in the peer tutoring class. Recruiting students for the class and teaching and monitoring it are very interesting and rewarding activities, but they are also very demanding and exhausting.

For more information about the Lake Washington program, contact Kathy King, Peer Tutoring Program Manager, Lake Washington High School, 12033 N.E. 80th, Kirkland, Washington 98033, (206) 828-3371.

Practice: Secondary Peer Tutoring

The description which follows is based on observation of and interaction with students in three peer tutoring classes, as well as interactions with the program manager.

Students entered the peer tutoring room and sat down, two or four to a table. Warm greetings and good-natured teasing between the teacher and the students took place at the beginning of each class period.

The teacher began each class by displaying an overhead transparency of the Monthly Time Management Calendar used by the students. She called students' attention to current requirements and deadlines, including a reminder that midterm reports were about to be given regarding students' progress in their classes. She reviewed the kinds of classroom behaviors that could improve their reports, asking students to identify some appropriate behaviors. Maintaining eye contact, not talking out of turn, and asking questions were among the behaviors mentioned.

The teacher then called students' attention to an event affecting many of them, an upcoming American Government test. She displayed a transparency of a Daily Goals sheet, and indicated how it might be filled out to guide students in preparing for the test.

Students then began working, mostly in pairs, although there were some students whose tutors or tutees were not present. In the first period class, there was also a group of four students who were working together on preparing an oral report on AIDS and drugs. In all of the classes, the teacher moved around the room, answering questions, stopping to help students as needed, and getting students

back on task. Periodically, the teacher found it necessary to tell students to be more quiet. Part of the noise level was created by off-task behavior, but most seemed to emanate from the interactive nature of tutoring.

At the end of each class, the teacher reminded students to complete the Learning Log portion of their Daily Goals sheet, which asks for a brief description of "What I Learned Today." During the break between the first and second class observed, several students remained in the tutoring room engaged in a spiritied discussion about the law of supply and demand as applied to drugs and alcohol.

Students were individually asked (1) how peer tutoring had benefitted them, and (2) what advice they would give to other high schools about setting up a peer tutoring program. Responding to the first question, students commented:

- "It helps you build relationships with others. You get to know people you might not get to know without this class." (Girl "teeter," second-year participant)
- "You get to see someone else learn and take pride in helping others." (Girl tutor, second-year participant)
- "You get help finishing your assignments and you make new friends." (Boy tutee, second-year participant)
- "You worry out loud. My grades are better and I like it. It's not like a class." (Boy tutee, first-year participant)
- "It helps me study and learn more independently." (Boy tutee, first-year participant)
- "It makes you work hard." (Girl tutee, first-year participant)
- "I'm L.D. [learning disabled] and my parents wanted me to take it [peer tutoring class]. I like it. I get my work done." (Boy tutee, second-year participant)
- "It helps to get homework done and study for tests. It's boring, but it helps." (Girl tutee, second-year participant)
- "It fills a gap. Teachers don't always have time to help you at the end of class. It helps you make good use of time and get things done." (Boy "teeter," third-year participant)
- "My study skills and organizational skills are better." (Girl tutor, second-year participant)

Asked what advice they would give to others considering setting up a peer tutoring program, students responded:

- "You need an understanding teacher who is flexible, because you have to be able to talk in this class." (Boy "teeter," second-year participant)
- "You need lots of spaces. There are kids here who want in this class, but there isn't any more room." (Girl tutor, second-year participant)
- "This class is too big and noisy. It should be smaller." (Girl "teeter," first-year participant)
- "Be sure and teach study skills and learning strategies, stuff like that." (Boy tutee, second-year participant)
- "You should have a teacher who can get you to work without being too pushy. The teacher should know the other teachers and what they expect. This class is good for that." (Boy tutor, second-year participant)
- "Set it up so tutors quiz you before tests." (Boy tutee, first-year participant)
- "It's good to work with people who have the same target class." (Boy "teeter," third-year participant)
- "A big class is good, but the noise is hard for some people." (Girl "teeter," second-year participant)
- "The teacher needs to understand individual needs." (Girl tutor, second-year participant)

In a spin-off from these question-and-answer periods, members of one peer tutoring class

began talking to one another about the benefits of the class and how a peer tutoring class should be set up. This included students who have been helped by the class encouraging their task-resistant peers to get involved.

Context: Benjamin Rush Elementary School

Three years ago, a consultant to the district worked with staff at Benjamin Rush Elementary School to develop a tutoring program and manual, which were subsequently adapted and implemented in the school. In its first year of operation, the program made use of fifth and sixth grade tutors, who worked with tutees in grades one, two, and three in reading and mathematics. Program evaluation data indicated that the program was successful; however, classroom teachers disliked the fact that tutors were missing regular class activities to work with their tutees. They called for a change in structure.

During the second year, the school implemented the "Help One Student to Succeed" (HOSTS) program, which relies upon parents and especially community members to tutor children who are in need of extra time and help to develop skills. The student-to-student tutoring component was greatly reduced, with fifth and sixth grade students working with students in grades one through three during part of the tutor's lunch/recess period. A highly-structured reading skill development program, which dovetailed with the basal reading series, was used. While useful, this program did not have built-in motivational components, and it was necessary for the teacher to continually develop motivation-building activities for tutors to use with their tutees.

This year the school continues to use the HOSTS program, with students in grades two to six participating. In addition, a cross-age tutoring structure is used with fifth and sixth graders working with first graders in reading. Major features of the cross-age tutoring program include:

- **Reading room.** This program makes use of a reading room with two-person work tables and in which the reading specialist is available to provide help.

- **Tutor selection.** The reading specialist makes presentations in the fifth and sixth grade classes; interested students write a letter on the topic, "Why I Would Be a Good Tutor." The reading specialist and classroom teachers make selections.

- **Tutee selection.** Children in need of remediation are recommended by their classroom teachers.

- **Partners in Reading.** This is a new and more motivational program than the one used in previous years. The program operates on a two-day cycle: on Day One, tutees read a story with help from their tutors, and on Day Two they review the story and conduct a series of activities related to it. Pictures, cut-outs, flashcards and other materials are used for these activities.

- **Use of the tutor's lunch/recess period.** Tutoring takes place twice a week, for 25 minutes at a time, during the tutor's lunch/recess period. First grade tutees leave their classrooms to come to the reading room, and their teachers conduct non-core activities during their absence.

- **Training.** Tutors receive an initial seven days of training, during which they learn the reading program structure, how to conduct activities with students, and methods for praising and encouraging students.

- **Recordkeeping.** In addition to daily records of activity completion and performance, tutors also complete quarterly "report cards" on their tutees. The reading specialist also prepares reports on the performance of tutors. Both kinds of reports are sent to students' classroom teachers.

- **Monthly meetings.** Tutors meet once a month with the reading specialist to discuss the progress of their tutees, complete appropriate forms, and bring up any problems they might be experiencing.

At the present time the program is small, with

12 first graders and 12 tutors participating. The goal for this year is to expand to 18 tutor-tutee pairs. The reading specialist noted that the next step in this continually evolving program may be to increase participants' involvement from two to three days per week, with the third day devoted to activities beyond the "Partners in Reading" materials now in use. The program may also expand once again to include second and third grade tutees.

Other significant program attributes include:

- Tutoring support is provided by local secondary parochial school students, who help out in fulfillment of their schools' community service requirement. These students tutor children in grades one through five.

- Considerable emphasis is placed, during training sessions and thereafter, on giving encouragement and positive feedback in order to build children's confidence and self-esteem. As noted at the secondary level, the best elementary tutors are often students who have experienced learning difficulties themselves.

- The reading specialist emphasized the necessity of working intensively with tutors and "overtraining" them, since a great deal of training is needed for them to function effectively.

When asked what advice she would give to others considering setting up a similar program, the reading specialist recommended that schools start small and expand the program slowly, and that they work to create an environment in which tutors can feel free to ask questions and voice their concerns. She also noted that scheduling the tutoring during the older students' recess period appears to have discouraged the participation of boys as tutors. Whereas several boys participated when the tutoring took place during class time, only two currently participate. The reading specialist speculated that boys are more reluctant than girls to give up their recess period.

More information about the Benjamin Rush Program is available from Sue Parker, Benjamin Rush Elementary School, 6101 152nd N.E., Redmond, Washington 98052, (206) 881-6047.

Example: Elementary Tutoring Program

During the small tutoring session (four tutors and four tutees), the tutors helped the first graders to sound out words with which they were having trouble as they read a story. The tutor covered parts of each difficult word and helped the tutee to read syllable by syllable. The tutor then asked the tutee to read the entire word, checking comprehension. Tutors also conducted comprehension checks of phrases, sentences and larger units of the story.

The tutors frequently praised their tutees during these interactions. The overall tone of the tutoring class appeared relaxed and positive, with students frequently smiling as they worked. The reading specialist was available to provide help during the session.

Tutors explained the system they used for conducting daily activities and keeping track of their tutees' progress. Their comments included that they enjoy helping people and seeing them learn better. Tutees were asked whether they like the tutoring class and, if so, what they like about it. Responses included:

- "I like it. She helps me."

- "I like to have someone to read with."

- "It's fun."

Tutors accompanied their tutees back to their classes at the end of the tutoring session.

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